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THE
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My Son

(Continued)
II.

We drifted into the habit of going out to dine at the restaurant, at different places each day.

—How delightful!—said my wife frankly—I am not fatigued making purchases; I am not put into an ill temper by the domestic because she has paid too much for early vegetables; I am not annoyed by having to blow on the fire in the stove which will not burn when I am hungry; there is no danger that the meat will be flavored with smoke. Our table is set at all hours of the day; in winter, one enters a beautiful dining room much larger than our four rooms all in one; we choose a seat by the window where we can watch the world go by; in summer, we remain out in the fresh air of the garden, and it is sufficient merely to tap on the glass with a fork, to have all that one could desire. . . just as in the palace of the fairies.

—And finally paying—observed I, smiling.

But thereupon Evangeline, relying securely on her experience as an economic house keeper, proved to me as surely as that two and two make four all things being considered, the same restaurant dinner would have cost us much more at home; and as to me, nothing remained but to accept her theory, and to ask her with a smile to pardon a great ignorance whose happiness he did not deserve.

We had chosen as a model for our far distant future, an old couple, full of wrinkles and good humor. These two came each day to the restaurant; the old woman wore a hat like a funnel which the husband would carefully hang on the hat-rack, and then they seated themselves, fully displaying their baldness. They would consult for a long time in undertones before they could agree upon choosing the same dish; then they called for it with a sense of great cheerfulness, and watched it coming with smiles; and they ate meditatively, from time to time felicitating themselves by a glance of the eye, at the judicious choice of viands which they had made. When they went away, arm in arm, it seemed that cheerfulness had vanished. Evangeline and I remained for a moment in silence, and then one or the other of us said:

—We also, we will always come to the restaurant to dinner.

In short, we love each other, and we were both persuaded that the world commenced and ended in us.

It was necessary to see us when we set out from the restaurant, arm in arm, I chewing a tooth-pick, erect, robust, superb, my Evangeline serene and smiling; both enjoying the rays of the setting sun or the dark clouds of the summer evening which threatened to force us to run home for shelter, or the magnificent snowy clouds which obscured the sun;—it was necessary to see us then to comprehend what exquisite sentiment emanates from an easy digestion for both of us.

Shall we move on? Shall we rest? or run or walk slowly? we can do whichever we prefer.

There is no danger that during our absence our infants will tumble down stairs, or fight with each other like good little brothers, or set fire to the bed curtain with matches smuggled from the kitchen.

Listen! is this a youngster which trills like a prima-donna, or a prima-donna who . . . There is no doubt, it is a youngster. We throw a glance of compassion to the third story window from whence descends these soprano notes, and pass along;—this youngster is not ours. And we think:—patience, poor young mothers, patience, little angels, this is the heaven to which you have been sent.

A little further we encounter an-

other little tot who is learning to take his first steps; how tiny it is! how it totters; the wish comes to us at each instant to run after it with a pillow in our hands to put under it lest it fall and hurt itself. And see there another who plants himself in the middle of the street and will not budge; the mother, the father, the maid strive to persuade him, they do not succeed; they essay to take his hand and the little man utters cries loud enough to cause his little colleague on the third floor to suddenly cease, probably to listen. At this noise, some passers-by stop . . . what is the matter? nothing strange; a natural phenomenon; but the poor mother flushes painfully; the father seeks a hole in which he can hide himself; the servants assemble and carry him away, the little family following toward the house; some one laughs and the crowd disperses. And we look at each other without saying a word; then I say jokingly: Observe one of the first comforts which a well raised child believes it his duty to give to papa and mamma.

—And this is nothing probably in comparison with those which they reserve for more mature years—said Evangeline.

—When he shall have entered the University at Pavie—pursued I following her thought,—he will make the acquaintance of a certain Madame Rosa, a friend of the students—and of twenty per cent per month.

—And when for a word too quickly spoken aloud in the cafe, he will go on the grass, as they say, with a school comrade.

—Or when . . . ah!—said I, interrupting myself, seized by a feeling of compassion—if this poor father could at present see all the troubles which are reserved for this lad, he would give him a good flogging, quite sure . . . but not now—I added thinking better of it.

—Why not now?—demanded Evangeline.

I laughed, and then she understood me, and she began to laugh so heartily that the passer-by glanced at us, and then stopped and turned to look at us again. We heard one of them say:—These are newly married, they are very happy!—I looked round at them indulgently, and I had a strong will to say to them:

—Yes, gentlemen; this is my Evangeline; we have not been married a very long time; we love each other and we are very happy.

In our selfishness, we chose for ourselves a companion, but with judgment; this was a discreet friend who sang all day our wedding song and took in all our joys without ever demanding more than we chose to give him. He was not a phoenix, as you might believe, but merely one of that family. He called himself Blackbird without really being a black bird.

It was not even a starling, and still less a solitary sparrow; it sang like a tenor of the first rank and hissed like a season-ticket opera-goer. In the science of ornithology, so far as achieved by my wife and myself, this plumed being was only a black bird; and in such fashion he lived and died bearing this name which was not his, and made the best of it.

I still remember that cruel day, since early morning our companion, I may say our son, remained in the corner of its cage motionless, its eyes closed; from time to time it essayed to pick nonchalantly at an insect which fell near its beak, and remained indifferent to the seduction of songs the most exquisite which were most potent to bring happiness to a black bird. My wife did not know what to think; she enquired of the neighbors and of those whom she met, what could possibly be the malady which afflicted her blackbird, and how it might be cured? And on an occasion so sad, she gave proof of a truly maternal heart, lavishing a thousand tender caresses on the poor little animal, calling it a hundred pet names, but all in vain. After having unjustly passed as a

blackbird during its life, this little creature came to die in the flower of its years, as one might say, without our being able in the least to discover its true name. And, nobody can get it out of my head, this poor thing voluntarily gave up its life to escape from a world full of injustice and ignorance, considering the fact that the porter who had the care of him during his last hours, and who had solemnly promised to save his life, discovered, in making an autopsy, that the deceased had swallowed a needle. The homicidal steel had pierced its vitals; the porter shivered with horror, and I too, and we were of one accord in giving an honorable sepulture to the dead bird without revealing to my wife the hidden drama of which our eyes had seen the fatal termination.

I would not wish to raise an ill natured suspicion to the detriment of my neighbor, but I flatter myself in its reproduction today, the fault does not seem so grave that I should hesitate to do so. From a certain embarrassment of the porter, from a testifying feather which remained attached as an accusation to the corner of his jacket, from his singular earnestness to impress upon me that our blackbird had been buried in the garden, I was as fatally induced to believe that the living sepulchre had been himself, as if I had read its epitaph on his stomach. Yes, because the defunct had been fat; worries had not destroyed its appetite, and up to the very day when it had taken the somber resolution to commit suicide with a needle in its throat, unseen by my wife, it had eaten insects and dainty viands with the avidity of a bird of the best intention in the world. I wished myself mistaken, and I found a sort of comfort thereby, but I fear that precisely because this was not a blackbird, it was not the most savory of blackbirds.

Afterwards, the impression of the catastrophe having passed, I found courage to laugh and to write an epitaph, and my sole regret was that I was not able to write it on the authentic sepulcher.

The loss of this unknown little creature who saluted us each morning with an open throat, who came to peek lovingly at our fingers, and who had never caused us one trouble, had affected me also. During some time, whenever I saw an empty bird cage, I was reminded of the companion of our empty but happy nest. The truth is, however, that seeing my Evangeline distressed, I endeavored to console her by saying that, according to the doctrine of the transmigration of souls, our blackbird might have become at this hour a little dog, and may be with time, would become worthy of human birth as the son of Signora Evangeline, wife of the advocate Placide.

The idea was uncouth, but produced its affect, which was to put us in a good humor.

—Think a little—I would sometime say to my wife—if, in place of a blackbird, we had lost a son.

I thought of it, and called to mind ten mothers brought to despair at having lost an infant; a father who had become insane, another who had committed suicide for the same cause; and I concluded very seriously that not to see one's son die, the only precaution suggested by experience would be to never see him born.

So I rubbed my hands, and I laughed and I was content; and I endeavored to render the companion of my existence happy by never putting between us and our happiness anything but a lively desire, a modest desire—the first client!

Oh, the first client!

I had waited morning and evening, delving in my codes in order to be prepared to receive him worthily; I put my books in orderly array; I placed my papers in piles which so arranged, defied the most expert eyes to recognize that mine was not

a numerous clientage. Some time my first client would come; he would have a complicated case; I would grant him an audience with gravity; I would engage to sustain the process and I proposed to carry him without undue precipitation before the bar of all the tribunals, initiating him into the mysteries of Civil Procedure.

He was seated listening to me; at each technical word a little difficult which escaped from my mouth, he opened his eyes like windows; he was smitten with my knowledge and disposed to give me his process at law.

Dear dreams! . . . from this somnambulist and sweet egotism I was awakened one day abruptly.

My Evangeline suffered; for a week she had eaten but little; she complained of certain pains, of a certain sickness, of a little languor. This will amount to nothing—said she; and to console her, I also repeated:

—This will amount to nothing.

But one morning she looked more sick than usual.

—Oh heaven!—thought I—if she should die!

I descended the stairs to call a celebrated physician living on the first floor; who made his visits in a carriage and who earned more in one day than all my revenues for a month.

While he was mounting to our apartments, I thought:—The difficulty will be to pay him, but I will have time; today it is necessary to save my Evangeline. Before entering, I was tempted to say to this celebrated man:—For charity, save my Evangeline!—I was prevented by a certain virile dignity which I wished to guard till the last extremity.

The doctor visited my wife, he examined her tongue, touched her pulse asked her certain questions which she answered hesitatingly, and at length he began to smile and said that it was nothing.

—Is there really no danger?—demanded I in a trembling voice.

—No, sir, at least not for the moment; and he drew me to one side to say to me with a malicious air:

—Give Madame the news yourself.

—Is it as it should be?

—Perfectly so.

Instead of accompanying the physician to the head of the stairs, as I had at first intended, I politely pushed him out of the room; after which, without in the least stopping to close the door, I ran to the bedside of my wife.

—Do you know the name of your sickness? You do not know? Do you wish to know?

—What is it called?

—It is called Auguste.

Evangeline threw her arms round my neck and covered me with kisses murmuring through her tears:

—Then that is why I felt that I loved you more than ever! Because now there are two of us to love you.

(To be continued.)

The Saleslady's Romance.

"Yes, I'm in the necktie department now. I like it ever so much better than selling ribbons. Men are so much easier to suit than women. All you've got to do is smile at them and you can sell them any old thing. The women will finger over the whole stock and not buy 10 cents' worth—just as if a lady had nothing to do but show goods. Besides, I don't like the floorwalker in the ribbon department. The one we've got now is lovely. His name is Perkins—Horatio Perkins—and he's just as swell.

"And, say, can you keep a secret? He's—you won't tell a soul?—well, he's in love with me. No, he hasn't said so yet, but I can tell by the way he looks at me—never takes his eyes off me from morning till night. He's jealous, too, and that's a sure sign. You ought to've seen him yesterday when George came in to invite me to the bill poster's ball. George—he's my old steady, you know—well, he and I was standing there talking when Horatio—I mean Mr. Perkins—came along. He gave me an awful fierce look, but I never let on that I seen him, but just kept right on talking.

"Then he stepped right up to me and says, his voice quivering with suppressed emotion, he says: 'Miss Robinson,' he says, 'are you aware that there are half a dozen customers waiting for you?'

"I know he only said that so as not to betray his real feelings, because when I turned around there wasn't any six customers there at all. There was only four."—New York Journal.

A GOOD SCHEME

Would Have Worked All Right, but There Was Too Much Enthusiasm.

"I know I oughtn't to give this away," said a local politician, "but it's too good to keep. The other day I happened to drop into the office of one of our campaign orators and noticed the manuscript of a speech which he proposed to deliver that night lying on his desk. Without thinking any harm I picked it up and in running my eye over the first few pages was surprised to find the thread of the argument interrupted here and there by a 'voice from the audience,' which asked pertinent questions. In each instance a very pat answer was written down, and I saw at once that a little comedy had been prepared in advance to show off the orator's skill at repartee.

"I laid the manuscript down and said nothing, but that night I went out to the meeting to see the fun. Knowing exactly where the first interruption was going to occur, I was on the alert when the place in the speech was reached, and, sure enough, up popped a tough looking individual and fired off question No. 1.

"I must admit the scene was well acted. When the question was asked, the audience laughed and then waited eagerly to hear what the speaker would say. For a moment he seemed embarrassed and disconcerted, and then, just as everybody thought he was completely cornered, he suddenly straightened up and shot back a reply so apt and witty that it turned the tables in a twinkling. The effect was electrical, and the whole house went wild.

"I snickered in my sleeve and waited for interruption No. 2, which passed off with equal eclat for the orator. In fact, the scheme would have been a great success if the interrupter hadn't played his part too well. He was so extremely natural and gave such a fine imitation of a hobo bent on breaking up a meeting that when he started in the third time a big policeman grabbed him by the neck and put him under arrest.

"He tried to protest, but it was no go, and in three minutes he was on his way to jail. After the meeting was over the orator hopped into a cab and hurried down to bail him out. I understand he was pretty sick of his job, and unless a substitute can be found the rest of my friend's speeches will probably be made without repartee trimmings."—New Orleans Times-Democrat.

Billville in Mourning.

We are in great sorrow because Dewey will not visit Billville. We had killed the fattest calf and made a pair of navy boots for him out of its hide, and all the leading oxen of the neighborhood had been barbecued in his honor.

The greasy pole which the mayor had promised to climb in the event of Dewey's coming has been taken down and chopped into firewood.

We have sent seven Billville physicians to Washington to prescribe for Admiral Dewey, and every one is sworn to tell him that nothing in the world will benefit him but the climate of Billville.

Dewey's relations, 750 in number, left yesterday for their respective homes.—Atlanta Constitution.

His Repertory.

"What have you been playing during your present tour?"

"We played 'Hamlet' and 'King Lear' on the stage," answered Mr. Stormington Barnes.

"Were there no comedies in your repertory?"

"Only one. When we came to count up the box office receipts, it was usually 'Much Ado About Nothing.'"—Washington Star.

Equalizing a Drawback.

He—I noticed that one of the leading golf players at the recent feminine championship contest was ruled off the course because she was offered some advice about her play by her husband.

She—it seems to me it would be no more than fair to give the women with husbands a reasonable handicap.—Cleveland Plain Dealer.

No Case on Record.

In the whole history of this country, not a single case has been recorded of fatigue on the part of any one who was collecting campaign funds.—Dallas News.

Bostonians and Their Sons.

How fortunate it is that a man usually gets his boy pretty well trained before the boy finds out what a humbug the father is!—Boston Transcript.

A Change.



"Hi ain't seen yer h'out lately wif your young lady, Mr. Timma?" "She hain't my young lady no longer now, Mr. Jones. I married 'er las Sunday."—Punch.